

POWER, AMBITION AND KNOWLEDGE: A THEMATIC EXPLORATION OF ASHWIN SANGHI'S *THE MAGICIANS OF MAZDA*

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ABSTRACT

Ashwin Sanghi's novel *The Magicians of Mazda* is a thrilling tapestry woven with threads of history, mythology, and suspense. This paper delves into the profound themes of power, ambition, and the never-ending human quest for knowledge as portrayed in the novel. It explores the intricate nature of these themes and their impact on individuals and civilizations, drawing parallels with historical figures, events, and mythical artefacts. By analyzing the characters' motives and actions, the paper aims to uncover the complexities of human nature and the enduring impact of our pursuits on the world around us.

The Magicians of Mazda is not merely an adventure novel; it's a complex exploration of the human condition. Sanghi skillfully intertwines historical events and mythological narratives to create a compelling story that resonates with readers on a deeper level. This paper aims to analyze the thematic core of the novel, focusing on the interplay of power, ambition, and the quest for knowledge. It is a rich tapestry of mythology, history, and philosophy, intricately woven together to explore profound themes, particularly power, ambition, and the quest for knowledge. Through a narrative that spans across time and cultures, Sanghi delves into the motivations that drive human behaviour, revealing the complexities of ambition and the often-corrosive nature of power.

The novel portrays power in its diverse manifestations, mirroring historical and mythological precedents. Power is a recurring theme throughout the novel, manifesting in various forms—political, spiritual, and intellectual. The characters are often embroiled in struggles for dominance, reflecting the age-old human pursuit of control. The protagonist's journey to uncover his heritage and the secrets of the past serves as a microcosm of this broader theme. Sanghi illustrates that power is not merely a tool for governance but a force that shapes personal identities and relationships. The characters in the novel are often portrayed as individuals who are deeply influenced by their desire to wield power, whether it be political, spiritual, or intellectual. For instance, the protagonist, who embarks on a journey to uncover the truth about his heritage, finds himself caught in a web of power struggles that date back to ancient times. This connection to history emphasizes how the quest for power transcends generations, impacting the present and shaping the future.

Sanghi illustrates that power can be both a motivator and a corrupting force. Characters such as priests and rulers are depicted as figures who manipulate knowledge and faith to maintain their control over followers. The narrative suggests that those in power often become blinded by their ambition, leading them to make morally

questionable decisions. This is evident in the actions of various antagonists in the story, who are willing to sacrifice ethics for the sake of power and dominance.

Scholarly works such as "Power and Influence: The New York Times" by John A. McPhee highlight how power dynamics influence individual actions and societal structures (McPhee, 1994). In the novel, characters who wield power often manipulate knowledge and belief systems to maintain their grip on authority. This manipulation underscores the idea that power can corrupt, leading individuals to make morally ambiguous choices in their quest for control.

The Ayatollah, the novel's antagonist, embodies the relentless pursuit of political power. His desire to acquire the Athravan Star, an ancient relic with immense power, reflects the historical tendency of rulers to seek mystical artefacts to legitimize their authority. This is reminiscent of historical figures like Emperor Constantine, who embraced Christianity partly for its potential to unify the Roman Empire, or the Nazis' obsession with occult objects like the Holy Grail and the Spear of Destiny.

"Folklore tells us that Athravan Start had the most miraculous properties, almost magical, replied Supreme Leader." (26)

Jim Dastoor, the protagonist, represents the power of knowledge. His scientific expertise is crucial to unlocking the secrets of the Athravan Star. This echoes the historical significance of figures like Alan Turing, whose code-breaking skills were instrumental in World War II, or Marie Curie, whose pioneering research on radioactivity revolutionized science and medicine.

"The GCRC has been financed by benefactors who believe in our mission to heal the world. And over the years we have come up with several profitable projects ventures that have created substantial income streams to ventures that have created substantial income streams to finance our not-for-profit work. But Hamzaaa Dura is meant to serve humanity, not corporations." (16)

The Athravan Star itself symbolizes spiritual power, capable of granting extraordinary abilities. This resonates with ancient beliefs in powerful artefacts like the philosopher's stone, sought by alchemists for its alleged power to grant immortality and transmute base metals into gold.

Ambition is another critical theme that Sanghi explores throughout the novel. The drive to achieve greatness often forces the characters to undertake dangerous journeys, both physically and metaphorically. The protagonist's ambition to uncover hidden truths pushes him beyond his limits, highlighting the lengths to which individuals will go in pursuit of their goals. However, Sanghi also presents the darker side of ambition, showcasing how it can lead to isolation and conflict.

One poignant reference in the novel is the character's internal struggle as he grapples with the implications of his ambitions. The text prompts readers to question the cost of ambition—whether the rewards are worth the personal sacrifices made along the way. This theme resonates with the idea that ambition, while a catalyst for success, can also lead to devastating consequences if unchecked.

Ambition, a potent motivator, drives the characters in the novel, leading them down different paths. Ambition is intricately linked to the theme of power in the novel. The characters' quests are driven by a desire to achieve greatness, but Sanghi presents ambition as a double-edged sword. While it can inspire individuals to reach remarkable heights, it can also lead to detrimental consequences. The protagonist's relentless pursuit of truth and knowledge often places him at odds with those who prioritize power over ethics.

In her article "The Dark Side of Ambition" in the Harvard Business Review, Amy Gallo discusses how unchecked ambition can lead to ethical compromises and personal

isolation (Gallo, 2014). This theme resonates within Sanghi's narrative, as the protagonist grapples with the fallout of his ambitions, questioning whether the sacrifices he makes are truly worth the potential rewards. The tension between ambition and morality highlights the internal conflict faced by individuals in their pursuit of success.

The Ayatollah's ambition for political dominance and regional hegemony mirrors historical figures like Napoleon Bonaparte, who sought to conquer Europe, or more recently, Saddam Hussein's ambition to control the Middle East.

"He didn't want to say that Atharvan Star was a Zoroastrian treasure rather than an Iranian one. Hundreds of years of Islamic attacks and rule had also resulted in a huge drain of priceless items into Arab treasuries. Except that the Athravan star can be anywhere in the world." (26)

Jim's ambition stems from his scientific curiosity and the desire to unravel the mysteries of the Athravan Star. This echoes the ambitions of scientists like Albert Einstein, driven by a desire to understand the universe, or Jonas Salk, who dedicated his life to developing a polio vaccine.

The quest for knowledge is intricately tied to the themes of power and ambition in *The Magicians of Mazda*. Knowledge serves as a double-edged sword; it can empower individuals but also place them in danger. The novel suggests that the pursuit of knowledge is often driven by a desire for power. Characters who seek to uncover ancient secrets or harness mystical forces embody the idea that knowledge is a form of power in itself.

Sanghi employs historical and mythological references to enrich this theme, illustrating how knowledge has been sought after throughout civilization. The quest for understanding the divine and the mysteries of existence is portrayed as a timeless endeavour, with characters often facing moral dilemmas that arise from their discoveries. The narrative raises questions about the ethical responsibilities that come with knowledge—should it be used for personal gain, or should it serve a greater purpose?

Jim's relentless quest to understand the Athravan Star reflects humanity's inherent curiosity and desire to comprehend the universe. This pursuit has been a driving force throughout history, leading to breakthroughs in science, philosophy, and art, exemplified by the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, and the ongoing scientific revolution. Characters who seek to unlock ancient mysteries often find themselves entangled in conflicts that challenge their moral compass. Sanghi suggests that the pursuit of knowledge carries profound ethical implications, raising questions about the responsibilities that accompany it.

The novel also cautions against the dangers of unchecked knowledge. The Ayatollah's pursuit of Athravan Star for destructive purposes mirrors the ethical dilemmas surrounding scientific advancements like nuclear weapons or genetic engineering. Driven by a lust for power and a desire to establish an Islamic caliphate, his actions threaten global stability.

Jim, who is motivated by scientific curiosity and a sense of duty to protect the world, becomes an unlikely hero. Jim's wife, a historian, provides crucial insights into the past, highlighting the importance of understanding history to navigate the present.

The philosophical underpinnings of this theme can be traced back to works like "The Republic" by Plato, which examines the relationship between knowledge, power, and virtue (Plato, 380 BC). In the novel, characters who seek knowledge are often confronted with the question of how to wield that knowledge responsibly. This is evident in the protagonist's journey, where he must navigate not only the acquisition of knowledge but also the ethical dilemmas that arise from it.

Conclusion

The Magicians of Mazda is a multifaceted novel that explores the relation between power, ambition, and the quest for knowledge. Sanghi masterfully interweaves these themes, drawing parallels with historical events and figures, and enriching the story with layers of meaning. The novel serves as a cautionary tale, reminding us that the pursuit of power and knowledge, while essential for human progress, can also lead to devastating consequences if not tempered with wisdom and ethical considerations.

In this novel Ashwin Sanghi masterfully explores the intertwined themes of power, ambition, and the quest for knowledge. Through the journeys of his characters, he illustrates the complexities of human desire and the moral implications that accompany it. The novel serves as a reminder of the timeless nature of these themes, urging readers to reflect on their own pursuits and the impact of their ambitions on the world around them. As Sanghi weaves together ancient wisdom and modern challenges, he invites us to consider the true cost of power and the pursuit of knowledge in our lives.

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